



THURSTON COUNTY HISTORICAL JOURNAL



“Modern Olympia”: Lou Diven Describes Thurston County in 1899

A Fresh Look at Olympia’s “Old Port”

\$5.00

A FRESH LOOK AT OLYMPIA'S "OLD PORT"

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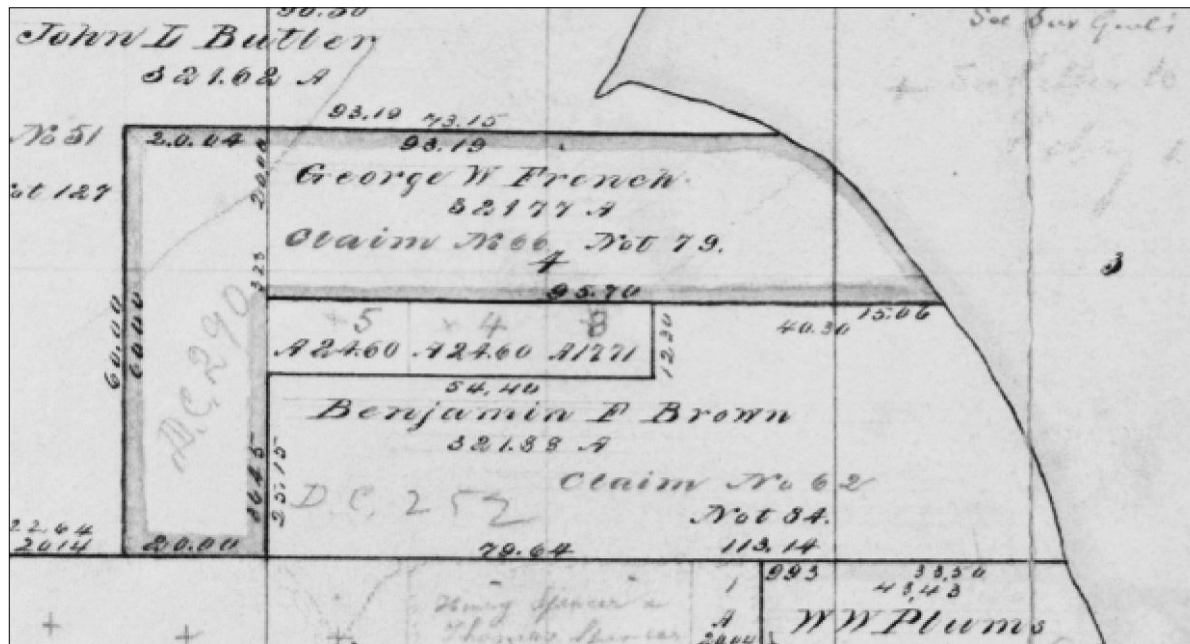
Much has been written in the past about the relationship between Olympia's Oldport Community and a commercial dock on the west side of Budd Inlet known informally as "Brown's Wharf." Unfortunately, most of those resources contain significant factual errors. Nevertheless, there is widespread agreement that the name "Brown's Wharf" resulted from the participation of Benjamin Franklin Brown and his wife, Mary Olney Brown, in the wharf business of West Olympia.

Understanding the relationship between the Oldport Community and Brown's Wharf is made more complex by the fact that over time, properties on the west side of Budd Inlet have been surveyed and described using three different systems: Donation Claim; Township and Range; and plats of, and additions to, Olympia. A parcel of land surveyed under one of the first two systems often presents an arduous problem when trying to locate the same parcel on a modern map of Olympia.

As a seaport, the early history of Olympia was complicated by the fact that during low tides, mud flats were exposed, making it impossible for ocean-going ships to remain in port

for more than a few hours at a time. Thus, in the decades before the 1880s, a wharf was needed in a place where the water was consistently deep, even though a wharf on the west side of Budd Inlet was inconveniently distant from the downtown area. The problem was finally solved permanently in 1881 when a long, downtown wharf was authorized by the Olympia Town Board.¹ That wharf was extended to a length of $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, in 1887.² Following the extension, the downtown wharf stretched far enough north to reach consistently deep water. After 1887, there was little need for a city wharf located in West Olympia.

Part of a document produced by the Olympia Port Commission in 1974 is representative of the sort of erroneous notion commonly held by many Thurston County residents. "In September of 1875, a special levy election of two and one-half mills carried one hundred thirty-two to five, which funds were to be spent on a wharf. A wharf at the foot of Capitol Way was desired, but the costs were prohibitive. Instead, the wharf was built on the Westside, on the old Brown's claim. This was the 'Old Port,' and a present residential development on the site [the Oldport Community] uses that name."³



Part of a 1764 map preserved at the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office Records. George W. French's name is the only one recorded for the French Donation Claim, which was in parts of Sections 3, 4, and 5 of Township 18 North, Range 2 West. Also in 1864, John and George W. French jointly patented 35 acres in Lot 4 of Section 5, which was 0.25 mile west of the George W. French Claim. John and George were of similar age and probably were related (brothers or cousins). The Brown claim was immediately south and east of the George W. French claim. Deed records show that after 1857, Konrad Schneider owned virtually all of the W. W. Plumb Donation Claim.

Two additional sources also contain misinformation regarding this subject. First, *How The West Was Once* reports an event related to construction of a wharf on the west side of Budd Inlet: "Then, on September 23, 1857, a special levy election was held, asking a tax of 2.5 mills for a wharf."⁴ In fact, that election was held on September 23, 1875, and voters approved the levy. Subsequently, the Town of Olympia Board of Trustees passed the levy in a special meeting held on October 4, 1875.

How The West Was Once continues: "The West Olympia Homestead Association was formed by B. F. Brown and his neighbor, John French. Mr. Brown also wanted to secure the location of the wharf on the Brown Land Claim."⁵ Contrary to that statement, neither Brown nor French were members of that Homestead Association.

Finally, the publication states: "But when a new wharf was built at the foot of Main Street, Brown's Wharf became known as Old Port, which is

now a housing complex on the Westside.”⁶ Although the Oldport Community was named for Brown’s Wharf, this statement is misleading. Brown’s Wharf was actually sited rather distant from the community named for it.

A third reference comes from *History of Oldport*: “In 1857 John French and his neighbor, Benjamin F. Brown, just south on land known as the Brown Donation Land Claim, built a wharf – Brown’s Wharf, just off Oldport’s beach to deep water.”⁷ Almost everything in this statement is unsupported by historical records.

Contrasting with these statements, no 19th Century document can be found which verifies that the wharf built in 1875 was located in the vicinity of the modern-day Oldport Community.

There is no question that, before 1887, members of the Brown family were associated with two separate deep-water wharfs along the west shore of Budd Inlet. Records from that era suggest that both were known informally as “Brown’s Wharf.”

The first of these was organized as the West Olympia Wharf Company in the late 1850s and was functioning as early as 1858.⁸ The West Olympia Wharf Company was incorporated by an act of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Washington on January 24, 1861. Stockholders were B. F. Brown, G. W. French, Silas E. Dennis, Ira Ward, and E. Montgomery.⁹ Records to be described subsequently in-

dicating that this wharf was sited approximately 0.3 mile southeast of the location of the modern-day Oldport Community.

The second of these structures was incorporated in 1876 by the West Side Wharf Company.¹⁰ It was located near, if not precisely where the previous West Olympia Wharf had been. The Trustees of the West Side Wharf were Samuel W. Percival, George W. French, Andrew J. Littlejohn, and Mary Brown, the wife of Benjamin F. Brown.



The locations of the Oldport Community and the West Olympia Wharf (Brown’s Wharf) are shown on part of the 1937 US Geological Survey map of the Olympia Quadrangle. Image courtesy of livingatlas.arcgis.com.

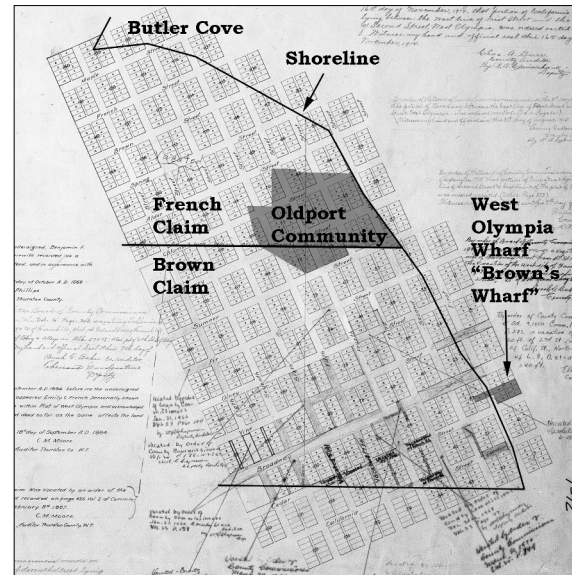
The following part of this article is presented as a chronological narrative describing events related to the history of the Oldport Community and wharfs associated with the Brown family.

The year 1857 is a plausible estimate for the starting date of operation for the first wharf associated with the Brown family. As mentioned earlier, the West Olympia Wharf was definitely operating in August 1858, when the steamer *Surprise* made a port call there. In the newspaper article referenced above (see endnote 8), the facility was called “Brown’s Wharf,” which is also mentioned in several subsequent newspaper articles.¹¹

John M. Swan was an early stakeholder in the venture. In November 1858, he sold his one-ninth share in the West Olympia Wharf Company, plus “a certain scow” to Benjamin Franklin Brown.¹²

The precise location of the West Olympia Wharf (the first structure called “Brown’s Wharf”) is revealed in a January 1860 deed. Therein, Benjamin F. Brown sold a parcel of land located in the Plat of West Olympia to the West Olympia Wharf Company. The property is described as [Lots 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, and 12 of Block 5](#), and [Lot 3 of Block 22](#), “fronting on Front and First Streets and between Broadway and Cedar Streets.”¹³

This land was (and is) in the southeast corner of the Benjamin F. Brown Donation Claim. It is quite distant



Benjamin F. Brown and his wife, Mary Olney Brown, recorded this Supplemental Plat of West Olympia on October 16, 1869. The author has highlighted the shoreline, the line between the French and Brown Donation Claims, and the areas of the Oldport Community and the West Olympia Wharf. Accessed at Washington State Archives.

from the George W. French Claim, where most of the Oldport Community is now located. Over time, most of the streets in the plat of West Olympia have been vacated. Thus, they can no longer be found on modern maps. In 2024, some of Block 22 is found at 1708 25th Avenue NW, in Olympia. It is identified as Thurston County Assessor Parcel 83002200300.

The West Olympia Wharf Company was a defendant in a September 1860 civil lawsuit. Benjamin F. Brown and George W. French were also named as defendants; John Scott and William G.

Dunlap were the plaintiffs. The suit alleged negligence in handling the plaintiff's goods at the wharf, such that those goods were damaged by salt water.¹⁴

As mentioned earlier, the West Olympia Wharf Company was formally incorporated in 1861.

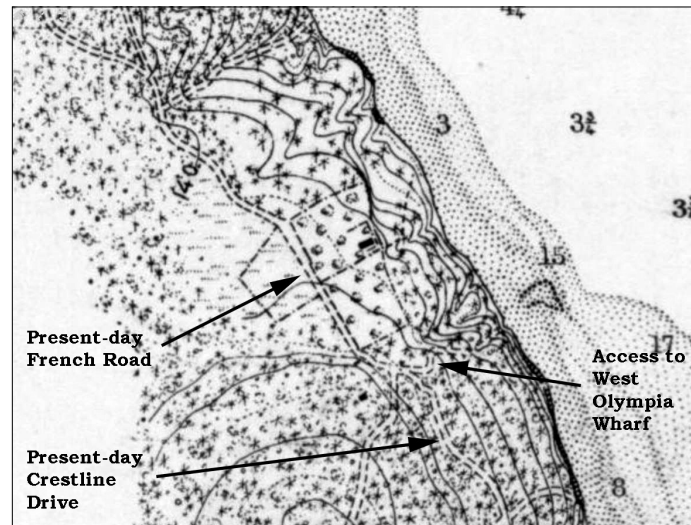
In the 1860s and early 1870s, there was no improved road between the West Olympia Wharf and the area west of the Marshville Bridge (now the Fourth Avenue Bridge). During those years, the wharf was primarily a transit point where ships plying the waters of Puget Sound could be moored. Cargos were transferred to and from smaller craft, which could access downtown Olympia at high tide.

Over several months in 1870, Benjamin F. Brown acquired all shares of the West Olympia Wharf Company owned previously by George W. French, John S. French, Silas E. Dennis, and Eli Montgomery. "The property of said company being situated on the West side of Budd Inlet about two miles below (north of) the old town of Olympia, Thurston County, Washington Territory."¹⁵

On June 30, 1872, George W. French and his wife, Emily, sold the timber rights on 575 acres of their land to Isaac (Ike) C. Ellis for \$700. Included was most of the George W. French

Donation Claim (where much of the Oldport Community is located) and most of the John L. Butler Donation Claim. French was to receive all the manure made at the logging camp and Ellis was authorized to "make roads and railways (skid roads and possibly tram roads) for removing the timber."¹⁶ The document stipulated that all marketable timber was to be removed by 1873.

A deed from late in 1872 suggests that a fundamental change had occurred within the West Olympia Wharf Company. Dated November 14, the document reads: "Whereas the West Olympia Wharf Company has



Part of an 1876 map displaying the area around the present-day junction of French Road and Crestline Drive. A remnant of the road used to access the West Olympia Wharf is visible. Although it went into operation in 1876, the West Side Wharf had not been added to this map. Budd's Inlet Puget Sound W.T. 1876 courtesy of vilda.alaska.edu.

become defunct by failing to maintain its Company organization . . . stockholders of the West Olympia Wharf Company, for the consideration of one dollar . . . convey to Benjamin F. Brown . . .” property in the plat of West Olympia. That property was the same parcel that Brown had sold to the West Olympia Wharf Company in 1860.¹⁷

An August 2, 1873 *Washington Standard* article implies that an attempt was being made to connect the West Olympia Wharf to Olympia via an improved wagon road. “Road Improvement. – The Board of Trustees, at their last meeting [July 26, 1873] appropriated the sum of \$450 for the improvement of the road on the west side of the bay, from the Long Bridge [current site of the Fourth Avenue Bridge] to French’s wharf, a distance of about two miles. The road will prove a great convenience to all settlers on the west side.”¹⁸ The proposal was brought to the Board of Trustees by Konrad Schneider. This is the only instance found by the author where the West Olympia Wharf was called “French’s Wharf.”

In the mid-1870s, the citizens of Olympia began a serious discussion about establishing both an improved deepwater wharf on the west shore of Budd Inlet, and an adequate road connecting it with Olympia. At least three locations were under consideration for the location of the new wharf. One, to place the wharf at the north end of Main Street (now Capitol Way), was eventually rejected because there, it

would cost too much to build a structure long enough to reach deep water.

A second proposal was reported in the June 26, 1875 *Washington Standard*. That plan favored placing the wharf on land along Budd Inlet owned by Konrad Schneider. At that time, Schneider owned waterfront property in the W. W. Plumb and Moses Hurd Donation Claims (see the image of Donation Claims presented above). “This week a couple of our citizens made a thorough examination of the bay, and obtained soundings at low water, of the best approaches to the western shore, the nearest channel in which deep water is found, with other requisites at command, and available at a moderate cost of labor or money. They report in favor of a point on the Snider [*sic*] beach, about 700 yards south of Brown’s ‘wharf,’ where a dock 100 yards in length will reach three fathoms of water at the lowest stage of the tide. . . .

“There is already a fair wagon road from the west end of Long Bridge to the Snider [*sic*] place, . . .”¹⁹

This second proposal gained momentum a few months later when the West Olympia Homestead Company was incorporated on August 6, 1875. That enterprise planned to purchase and plat 160 acres of the Edwin Marsh Donation Claim. It also proposed to build a wharf to deep water “at the most eligible place on or near the Snyder (Konrad Schneider) Claim,” and build a road from there to the Marshville Bridge (now the Fourth Avenue

Bridge). The corporate papers for the enterprise were signed by I. C. Ellis, A. A. Phillips, T. F. McElroy, A. J. Burr, William M. Diggins, Edward Giddings, Samuel Williams, Robert Mack, H. Chapman, and N. Crosby.²⁰ Significantly, at that time, Ellis, McElroy, Burr, Diggins, Williams, Chapman, and Crosby were all Trustees of the Olympia Town Board.

The following day (August 7), the 1875 *Washington Standard* reported: "The petition of the undersigned tax-payers and electors of said town [Olympia] respectfully represents – That Konrad Schneider has entered into an obligation whereby he binds himself to convey to said town, in fee simple, a strip of land on the donation claim of William W. Plumb, one hundred feet in width, extending from a line five feet above high-water mark eastward to the east boundary of said claim, or to the meander line on the west shore of Budd's Inlet, for the purpose of erecting a wharf and warehouse out to a depth of three fathoms of water, together with a perpetual right of way over said claim to and from said wharf, of sixty and eighty feet in width, out to the county road extending from the Marshville Bridge along the west shore of Budd's Inlet, to the said Schneider's residence . . ." ²¹

As mentioned earlier, on September 23, 1875 Olympia held a special election to determine whether a new wharf should be built to deep water. The proposal passed.

A third proposed site for a new wharf

was at or near the place where the West Side Wharf had been. Remarkably, available newspaper articles and minutes of the Olympia Town Board make no mention of that potential site (the old location of Brown's Wharf) from January through September 1875.

At an October 4, 1875 meeting of the Olympia Town Board, seemingly with little or no preceding discussion, George W. French proposed to build the new wharf if he were granted a subsidy of \$1,500. It would be located "at the line between the Snyder [*sic*] and Brown Donation claims on the west side of Budd's Inlet, . . . the whole structure [to be] completed by the 1st day of January 1876."²² In the same meeting, the Board approved French's proposal unanimously.

The October 8, 1875 *Weekly Pacific Tribune* announced that the Olympia Town Board had selected a site for the new wharf: "The street committee was instructed to survey and locate a road from the west end of the long bridge [now the Fourth Avenue Bridge] to the wharf. The wharf will be on the Brown place, just across the line from the Schneider claim. Work will begin on the road and wharf at once."²³ On that date, a name for the new wharf had not yet been selected.

At a meeting of the Olympia Town Board on October 30, 1875, Martin and Bolander were awarded the contract for grading a road between the new wharf and the Marshville Bridge.²⁴ In December 1876, George

W. French and Andrew J. Littlejohn applied for more time to complete the new wharf. A one-month extension was granted.²⁵

The West Side Wharf Company was formally incorporated on June 10, 1876 by Samuel W. Percival, George W. French, Andrew J. Littlejohn, and Mary Olney Brown.²⁶ At the new wharf, the Brown family member involved with the business was the wife of Benjamin F. Brown. On August 22, 1879 George W. French sold his share of the West Side Wharf Company to Edwin C. Axtell. The transaction comprised an undivided $\frac{1}{4}$ of the company's real estate, personal property, rights and franchises.²⁷

In October 1882, the West Side Wharf Company became the defendant in a civil suit claiming damages to goods in its care. The plaintiffs were Fred Holmes and Daniel Tuite. The case mentions that there was a warehouse located upon the wharf. A scow was used to transport goods to downtown Olympia, and on May 26, 1882, the scow sank at the downtown location, allegedly due to negligence. Judgment in the amount of \$1,573.02 (over \$48,000 in today's economy) was awarded to the plaintiffs.²⁸

A Short History of Budd Inlet mentions "To connect sea and rail transport, a short logging railroad was built to Brown's Wharf in 1883, but the wharf did not prove to be a viable shipping point."²⁹ In 1883, "Brown's Wharf" was the name applied to the West Side Wharf. However, no credible evidence

has been found to suggest that a railway of any sort terminated there. Indeed, a structure designed as a commercial wharf would have been incompatible with the functions of a log dump.

The West Side Wharf Company ("Brown's Wharf") should not be confused with a Tacoma, Washington business identified as "Brown's Wharf & Navigation Company." Incorporated in 1886, the Trustees of that company were Thomas R. Brown, John F. Hart, W. W. Sprague, James M. Ashton, and George E. Atkinson.³⁰ That company's wharf was in Tacoma.³¹ Thomas R. Brown resided in Tacoma, Washington in 1885.³² His relationship to Benjamin F. Brown, if any, is unclear.

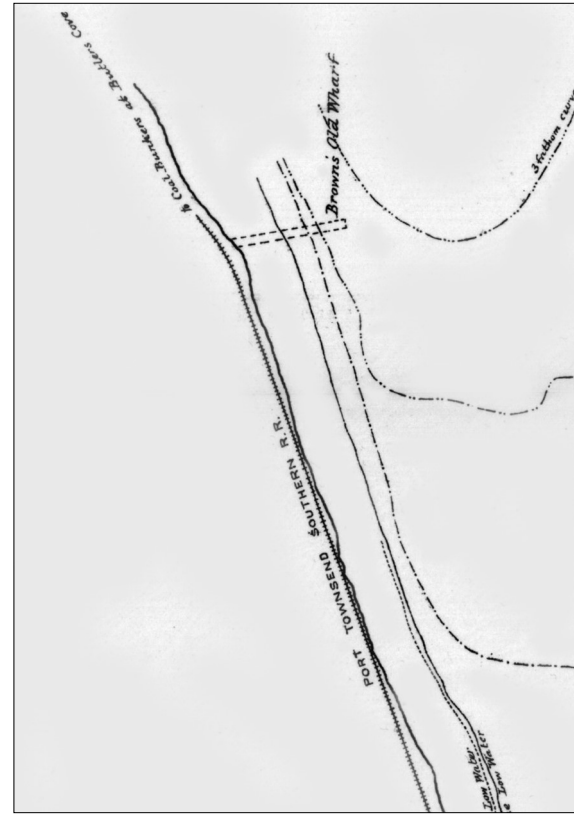
Brown's Wharf is mentioned in an undated letter transcribed by Mary Troy, a current resident of the Oldport Community. The author viewed this document on July 22, 2023. *Recollections of Eva Sturtevant Troy* recalls a visit to the George W. French farm (where Oldport is today) made by Mary Troy's husband's grandmother, Eva Sturtevant, when she was a child. "Down near the spring grew a great old tree which cast a wide spot of shade. In this shady spot father used to lie with me by his side and look at the ships as they passed by. The boats from San Francisco passed by on their way to old Brown's wharf. The wharf was owned by Theodore Brown's father."³³

The spring is visible in a drawing made by Janice Hillyard, which is presented later in this article. If ships had

been going to a wharf at the place where the Oldport Community currently exists, this eyewitness probably would not have described them as having “passed by,” but rather, would have said that they were coming *into* “old Brown’s wharf.”

The impending decline of the West Side Wharf (Brown’s Wharf) was forecast in 1881 when the Olympia Town Board authorized construction of a downtown wharf.³⁴ Subsequently, that wharf was lengthened over the next several years. Referring to Brown’s Wharf, *Comprehensive Plan for Utilization of Olympia Harbor Olympia, Washington* declares “The wharf was only five hundred feet long, but reached deep water. Brown’s Wharf continued in use until 1888, when the ‘long wharf’ at the foot of Capitol Way was completed.”³⁵ This document refers to the 1891 *Map of Olympia Harbor*, part of which is presented on the right. It is likely that the stated distance of 500 feet was obtained merely by measuring the length of the wharf on that 1891 map. In that case, that reported length may not be accurate.

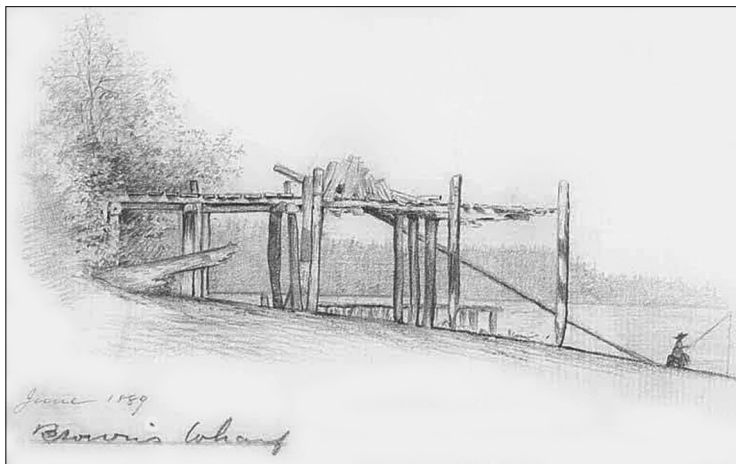
Many events took place in 1889 that would influence the later history on the west side of Budd Inlet. That year, the Oregon Improvement Company obtained control of the Port Townsend Southern Railroad.³⁶ The Cherry Hill Coal Company was incorporated at Olympia on December 27, 1889. Its original owners were Edmund and Stuart Rice, George D. Shannon, and John F. Gowey.³⁷ Later, Isaac W. Anderson joined the organization.



“Brown’s Old Wharf” as it appears on the 1891 Olympia Harbor Washington : map showing proposed improvements. The PTS track continued north, on the west side of the wharf, on the way to a bunker which was to have been used for export of Cherry Hill Coal Company coal. Map courtesy of Washington State University.

Brown’s Wharf had no relationship to the Cherry Hill Coal Company, the Oregon Improvement Company, or the Port Townsend Southern Railroad (abbreviated in this article as “PTS”).

By 1889, Brown’s Wharf was in an advanced state of disrepair.



A June 1889 sketch of Brown's Wharf looking north, "probably drawn by Helen McMicken." Many of the pilings have deteriorated or washed away. A remnant of the warehouse atop the wharf seems about to collapse. In the 1880 Federal Census, Helen F. McMicken lived in Olympia and was the wife of Herbert McMicken. Herbert was a clerk in the Surveyor General's office. Image courtesy of the University of Washington Libraries.

In the early 1890s, the history of West Olympia was influenced greatly by a planned expansion of the PTS. The PTS was the successor to the Olympia & Chehalis Valley Railroad, which had operated between West Olympia and Tenino. The PTS planned to build a connection between West Olympia and Port Townsend, Washington. That link was supposed to run north along the west side of Budd Inlet and then turn west at a point immediately south of Butler Cove. A variety of problems prevented the PTS from completing that right-of-way farther north than the place where the current Oldport Community is found.

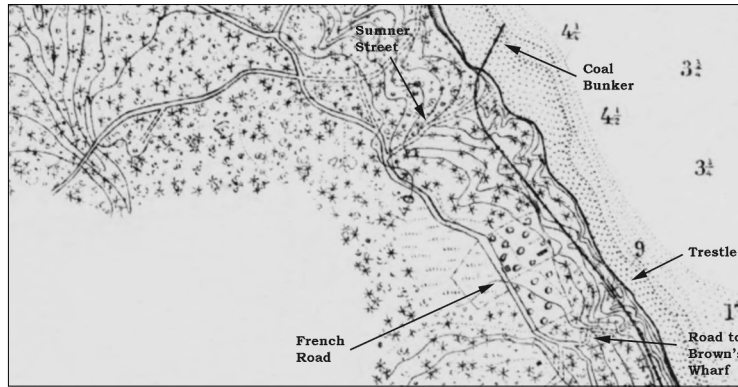
Significant remnants of PTS construc-

tion can still be found at the Oldport Community. Southeast of Oldport, the PTS track crossed a trestle in the area where Brown's Wharf had previously existed.

The Cherry Hill Coal Company played a significant role in the scheme leading to construction of the PTS's northward extension. Although the extension was never constructed farther north than the Oldport Community, a coal bunker was built at the end of the extension. The bunker was supposed to be used for shipping the output of mines at Cherry Hill, near Bucoda, Washington. A July 1891 newspaper article informs: "AFTER THE COAL - Port

Townsend Southern to Extend Its Line to Cherry Hill. A Bucoda Special: It is learned on reliable authority that in a few days the Port Townsend Southern Railroad company will begin the extension of their line from Tenino to Bucoda, if the right-of-way can be secured without much difficulty. Liberal inducements have been offered by Bucoda business men. The owners of the road are also owners of the Cherry Hill coal mines, which are located two miles east of Bucoda, and a large force of men are to be employed in opening these mines, which are to be worked to their fullest capacity."³⁸

The 1890 edition of *Poor's Manual of Railroads* lists the officers of the



Above: Part of the 1891 Olympia Harbor, Puget Sound, Washington map. The topographical features on this map are the same as seen on page 31. On the 1891 map, the PTS right-of-way has been added, along with a trestle in the area where Brown's Wharf had existed. The railroad ends at a coal bunker on Puget Sound.

Below: The author's 2023 photograph of the south abutment constructed as part of the trestle visible in the preceding 1891 map. The view is toward the northwest and the location is approximately 250 feet northwest of the 90-degree bend in 25th Avenue. In the period between 1858 and the early 1880s, the road to the West Olympia Wharf (and later, to the West Side Wharf) was in the ravine in front of, and below this abutment.



Olympia & Chehalis Valley Railroad, just before it became part of the PTS. Most of them had been associated with the Cherry Hill Coal Company one year before: Edmund Rice was President; Isaac W. Anderson was Vice-President; and Stuart Rice was Secretary. In addition, John F. Govey was Treasurer and A. D. Glover was Superintendent.³⁹

Although some of the right-of-way for the PTS's northern extension was bought by the PTS, including a right-of-way through Benjamin F. Brown's property,⁴⁰ most of the route was obtained in the name of the Cherry Hill Coal Company. Those purchases were made in 1890 and 1891 and included lands in the George W. French Donation Claim, the W. W. Plumb Claim, and the Moses Hurd Claim.⁴¹

The San Francisco Bridge Company received a contract for initial construction of the PTS's northern extension. When the contract was signed, the northern terminal was planned to be "at or near Butler's Cove." Originally, the line was to be located along the west shore of Budd Inlet and consist of a couple miles of right-of-way built on pilings and

bulkheads. But that route proved to be impractical and by mid-August 1890, a new, upland right-of-way had been selected.⁴² Approximately 2.5 miles of track was built between June 15 and November 5, 1890. The project included a wharf immediately north of the place where the Fourth Avenue Bridge is currently found.

Because the bridge company had received only \$11,892.86 of the \$32,458.04 it was owed by the PTS, work on the project was halted on November 5, 1890. At that time, the balance payable to the bridge company was \$20,565.15. On January 28, 1891, the San Francisco Bridge Company filed a lien against the PTS for that amount, plus accrued interest.⁴³

How much of the northern extension remained incomplete on November 5, 1890, and the name of the contractor who eventually finished the project, is unknown. However, the January 6, 1891 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* mentioned: "THE PORT TOWNSEND SOUTHERN. – Work Will Be Resumed Today at Olympia. Olympia, January 5. – [Special.] – Colonel S. W. Scott, right-of-way agent for the Port Townsend Southern, today received word that the work of construction to Butler cove would proceed at once. Two forces will start tomorrow to lay track from the present terminus to the new depot and thence to Butler cove."⁴⁴

Four weeks later, the February 1, 1891 *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported: "Olympia News. Olympia, Jan. 31. – [Special.] – The tracks of the Port

Townsend Southern railroad were completed to Butler's Cove today, two and a half miles below [north of] the city on the west side. This is the first standard gauge road to deep water on Budd's inlet. Coal bunkers are to be erected at once at this terminus, and will be completed by March 15, so that deep-water vessels can load with coal from the Bucoda mines."⁴⁵

A 2018 article in this journal clarifies the situation early in 1891: "In the spring of 1891, when construction at the Olympia end of the line to Union City should have resumed, the railroad's parent company (the Oregon Improvement Company) was experiencing a cash flow problem. Coal miners at its Franklin mine (located in eastern King County) had gone on strike the previous fall, and were being joined by miners at Newcastle and Black Diamond. A vicious labor dispute resulted, and for many months, the Oregon Improvement Company was unable to fulfill contracts for coal from its own mines. It had to purchase almost \$500,000 worth of coal in San Francisco and British Columbia to meet those commitments. In addition, costs relating to the strike itself amounted to \$75-80,000.00, money which had been earmarked for construction."⁴⁶

The Chief Engineer of the PTS certified that the railroad between Tenino and Butler's Cove was completed and ready to begin operating in September 1891.⁴⁷ The April 21, 1892 *Olympia Tribune* confirms that a coal bunker had indeed been constructed at the



A coal bunker is seen on the left in this circa 1890 photograph made at King Street, along the Seattle waterfront. Although no image of the Cherry Hill Coal Company bunker could be found, it probably was similar to the one presented here. Image courtesy of the University of Washington Libraries.

north end of the extension: “Parties from Spokane and Ellensburg are now prospecting in the neighborhood of Bucoda and another coal mine will soon be opened. Our coal should be shipped to Olympia by way of the Port Townsend Southern road. *It has the bunkers at the Sound end,* [author’s italics] but the company has not extended its line to Bucoda, as it should.”⁴⁸ As a result, the expected traffic over the northern extension never materialized. In fact, the PTS was never able to acquire a right-of-way between Tenino and the Cherry Hill mines. The bunker on the shore where the Oldport Community is today, never shipped any coal.

An undated (but probably from 1892) PTS document lists the mileage between Tenino and the terminal near Butler Cove as 17.6 miles.⁴⁹ But the 1893 *Poor’s Manual of the Railroads of*

the United States contains the following data for the PTS: “*Tenino Branch*: Olympia, Wash., to Tenino, Wash. 14.8 miles.”⁵⁰ The 1893 entry suggests that by then, the northern extension was no longer being operated.

The northern extension of the PTS from Olympia toward Butler Cove is described in Volume 116 I of *Interstate Commerce Commission Reports*. Page 376 notes that this three-mile segment of track was under construction in 1890-91, completed in 1891, and abandoned in 1894.

After the northern extension of the PTS was abandoned, the property in the George W. French Donation Claim, next to the place where the coal bunker had been, was bought and sold numerous times. Finally, it was purchased in 1928 by Millard Gerry Lemon, an Olympian active in the real estate business.⁵¹ Lemon lived at Oldport until his death in 1976, five years after the Oldport Community was platted.

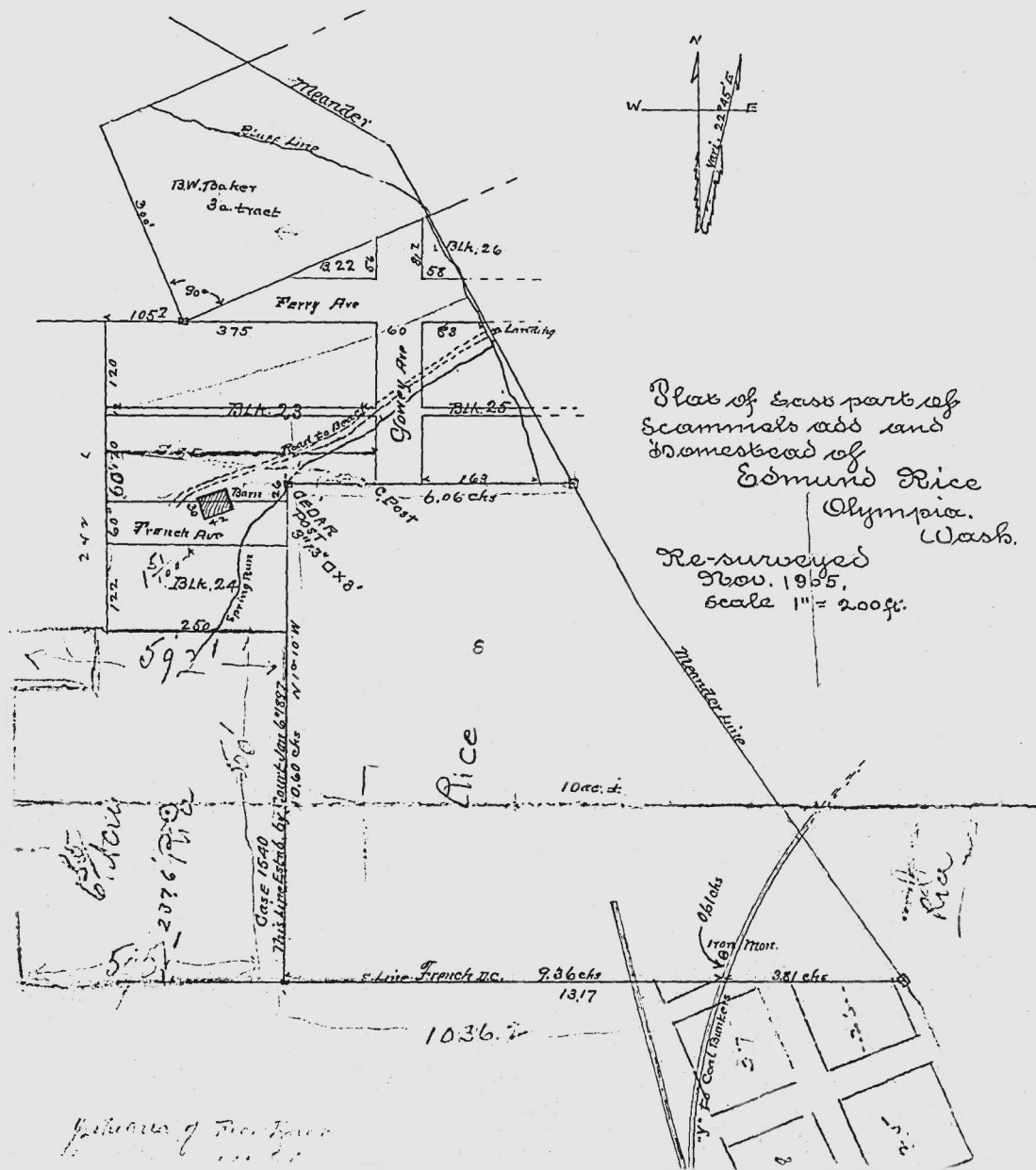
EXPLORING BROWN’S WHARF AND THE OLDPORT COMMUNITY IN MODERN TIMES

The place where Brown’s Wharf was located is privately owned in 2024. The road to the wharf almost certainly followed a descending course along the side of a ravine located on the east side of Crestline Drive. That access road would have joined the predecessor to modern-day Crestline Drive between 2510 and 2536 Crestline Drive. Home construction in that region has

JOHN B. WEDDELL
CIVIL ENGINEER

MEMBER O. L. E. AND S.

OLYMPIA, WASH., Dec. 14 190



Opposite: *Edmund Rice, who had previously been involved in the Cherry Valley Coal Company and the Olympia & Chehalis Valley Railroad, commissioned this November 1905 resurvey of the region on the border between the French and Brown Donation Claims. The document is part of the Oldport Community archive. The placement of the PTS right-of-way appears inaccurate to the author. In 1905, Rice lived in Denver, Colorado. The title to certain property in the French Claim was being perfected with a series of deeds filed in 1906, 1907, and 1909. The documents can be found in Thurston County Miscellaneous Book 8, page 430; Deed Book 54, page 504-505; Deed Book 69, page 215; Deed Book 73, page 301; Deed Book 74, page 636; and Deed Book 76, page 1.*

made it difficult to identify the exact course of the access road.

The best place to find a remnant of Oldport's past can be found at the southeast end of Anchor Lane. There, a substantial, filled right-of-way built by the PTS stretches to the southeast.

From the same vantage point, the view in the opposite direction (toward the northwest) reveals a backfilled cut, which was excavated by the construction company that built the right-of-way to the coal bunker. Just when the cut was backfilled has not been discovered, but clearly, that event must have occurred before lot #33 in Oldport, which uses Anchor Lane for access, could be developed.

Leeward Court in the Oldport Community is built over the northernmost part of the PTS cut leading to the coal bunker. Fred Saeger, a long-time Oldport resident, related to the author that a cave-in of the bluff above Leeward Court occurred sometime in the distant past. This likely contributed to the formation of "the sunken orchard" noted in the Janice Hillyard sketch.

CONCLUSION

The name selected for the Oldport Community implies that Olympia's old port (informally known as "Brown's Wharf") had been located there. That notion has been repeated often enough that it seems now to be common knowledge. In view of the facts presented here, it is clear that the structures known as Brown's Wharf were actually sited about 0.3 mile southeast of the Oldport Community. Nonetheless, the place where Oldport exists has its own fascinating history.

NOTES

¹ Olympia Town Board Ordinance #148 dated September 1, 1881. Thomas Wright received the contract to construct a wharf "from the north side of First Street at its junction with Main Street [now Capitol Way], northward, on a line with Main Street continued such a distance as will insure at the termination of said Wharf at least fifteen feet of water at the lowest tides..." (<https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/Record/View/543F36282E416F1BC47A7ADEE9B97A7A> : ac-

Opposite top: A 1957 aerial photograph of the area where later, the Oldport Community would be located. Several features are visible which also appear in the following sketch made by Janice Hillyard. These include the residence of Millard Gerry Lemon, the orchard, the sunken orchard, Klahanee Beach Road, Blarney Castle, and French Road. In addition, the author has added the PTS grade, a siding immediately south of the Oldport Community, and the coal bunker. Image courtesy of earthexplorer.usgs.gov.

Opposite bottom: The artist who created this sketch, Janice Hillyard, was a daughter of Millard Gerry Lemon. The work is undated, and Janice lived from 1930 to 2008. Most of the features seen here are correctly placed and identified. However, Brown's Wharf (the West Olympia Wharf) was not located here but rather, approximately 0.3 mile southeast of the Oldport Community. In addition, the downhill grade seen at the end of the PTS railroad track would have been impossibly steep for a railroad to operate on. Blarney Castle was a summer cottage which no longer exists. It appears in newspaper articles between 1921 and 1947. The November 6, 1947 *Daily Olympian* reports that Blarney Castle was "the old Sapp Summer home on Budd Inlet." Image courtesy of Oldport Community Archives.

cessed August 5, 2023).

² The Historic Pacific Highway in Washington-Smithfield/Olympia

(<https://www.pacific-hwy.net/smithfield.htm> : accessed August 5, 2023).

³ (1974, August 21) Port of Olympia, Resolution No. 834, Olympia Port Commission, Resolutions, 1922-2013, page 3 (<https://digitalarchives.wa.gov/DigitalObject/Download/579c99bc-503f-4f80-93fb-116abc0501ad> : accessed January 22, 2025).

⁴ Larry Smith's Eighth Grade English Classes, Jefferson Junior High School, *How the West Was Once: A History of West Olympia* (Olympia, Washington: publisher unknown, 1974), page 35.

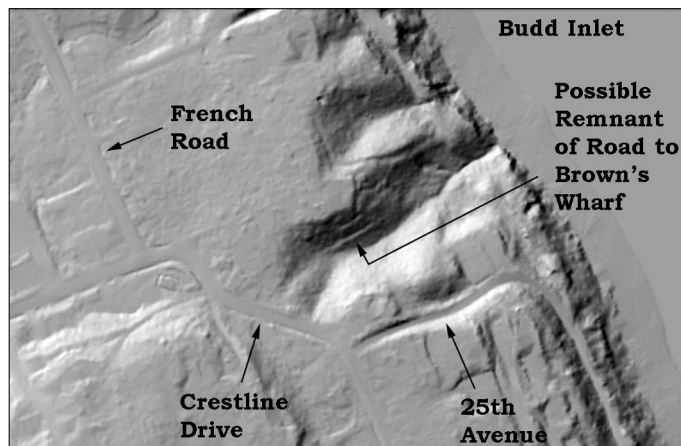
⁵ Larry Smith, page 35.

⁶ Larry Smith, page 37.

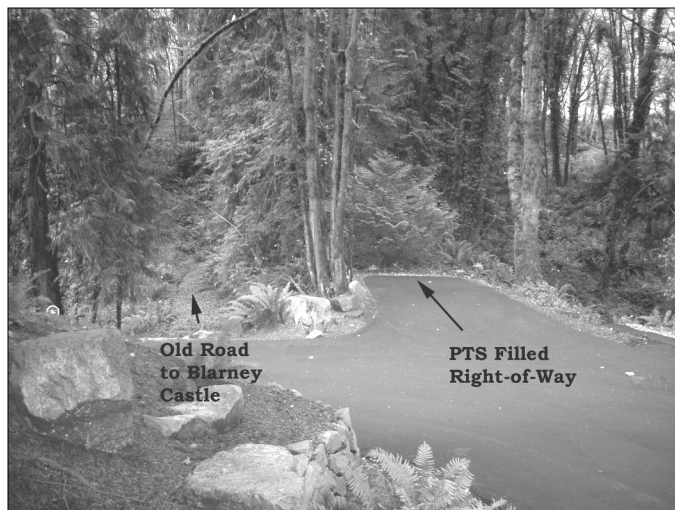
⁷ Marion T. Lemon, *History of Oldport*, unpublished, circa 1971, preserved by the Oldport Community archivist.

⁸ "Steamer 'Surprise.' – H. B. M. steamer *Surprise*, Capt. Huntington, arrived at Brown's wharf in our harbor on Tuesday evening last, 12 hours from Victoria," *Pioneer and Democrat* [Olympia], August 20, 1858, page 2.

⁹ AN ACT TO INCORPORATE THE WEST OLYMPIA WHARF COMPANY, SESSION LAWS OF THE TERRITORY OF WASHINGTON: AND THE RESOLUTIONS AND MEMORIALS OF THE EIGHTH REGULAR SESSION OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, HELD AT OLYMPIA, 1860 (Olympia, Washington: James Lodge, Public Printer, 1861), page 120. Preserved at the Washington State Archives.



Top: This is a modern LiDAR ground-imaging photograph of the area where the West Olympia Wharf and later, the West Side Wharf (both known as Brown's Wharf) existed after about 1857. Most likely, the road to the wharf descended to the level of the wharf in the ravine north of 25th Avenue. It probably joined the road to Olympia (now Crestline Drive) between 2510 and 2536 Crestline Drive. One feature visible in the ravine may be a remnant of that road. Image courtesy of apps.nationalmap.gov.



Center: The author's 2003 photograph taken at the southern end of Anchor Lane in the Oldport Community. The arrows in this image point in a southeasterly direction. Beyond the tip of the right arrow, the grade of the PTS's northern extension can be followed for several hundred feet to the southeast, at which point the grade disappears at the edge of a ravine. The ravine was crossed by a trestle when the right-of-way was active. Running along the east (left) side of the filled railroad grade is a remnant of the road used to access Blarney Castle (see the preceding 1957 aerial photograph, page 42).



Bottom: The author's 2023 photograph made facing northwest at the south end of Anchor Lane. Between 1891 and 1894, the PTS railroad ran through a level cut here, which later was backfilled to provide access to the residence at 3100 Anchor Lane NW (Lot #33 in the Oldport Community).

¹⁰ Articles of Incorporation of West Side Wharf Company. Filed June 10, 1876 and preserved at the Washington State Archives.

¹¹ “Brown’s Wharf” is also mentioned in the following newspaper issues: *Pioneer and Democrat*: October 8, 1858; May 27, July 15, August 12, and September 30, 1859; August 31, 1860; and February 1, 1861; *Washington Standard*: December 8, 1860.

¹² Thurston County Deed Book 6, page 723, signed November 25, 1858 but not recorded until 1870. All Deed Books referred to in following end notes are from the Washington State Archives.

¹³ Thurston County Deed Book 3, page 642, recorded October 20, 1860.

¹⁴ *Frontier Justice: Territorial Court Case Files*, Thurston Frontier Justice, Case Number 293, September 1860 (<https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/Record/View/E35468DBD3457155D46B2E90B05D7D41> : accessed August 6, 2023).

¹⁵ Thurston County Deed Book 6, pages 646 and 647.

¹⁶ Thurston County Mortgage Book A, page 224.

¹⁷ Thurston County Deed Book 10, page 13.

¹⁸ *Washington Standard*, August 2, 1873, page 2.

¹⁹ “A WHARF TO DEEP WATER,” *Washington Standard*, June 26, 1875, page 2.

²⁰ The incorporation papers for the West Olympia Homestead Association were filed August 6, 1875. The document is preserved at the Washington State Archives. One error in this declaration concerns Schneider’s property on the west side of Budd Inlet. Although he did own virtually all the W. W. Plumb Donation Claim and some of the nearby Moses Hurd Claim, the Konrad Schneider Donation Claim was located southwest of the current site of the Olympia Airport.

²¹ “THE WHARF PETITION,” *Washington Standard*, August 7, 1875, page 2.

²² Minutes of the Olympia Town Board, Minutes and Meeting Records, Olympia City Council, Minutes, 1859-2023, October 4, 1875. The site where the West Side Wharf was built was at or very near the location of the previous West Olympia Wharf. It was in the southeast corner of the Benjamin F. Brown Donation Claim, immediately north of land owned by Schneider in the Plumb Claim (<https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/Record/View/9C7BFB4E69E36515FB2248376890C3F6> : accessed August 4, 2023).

²³ “Olympia Wharf,” *Weekly Pacific Tribune* (Seattle), October 8, 1875, page 3.

²⁴ Minutes of the Olympia Town Board, Minutes and Meeting Records, Olympia City Council, Minutes, 1859-

2023, October 30, 1875 (<https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/Record/View/EA2310DDE0FA80FD4D479C672034A43F> : accessed August 6, 2023).

²⁵ Minutes of the Olympia Town Board, Minutes and Meeting Records, Olympia City Council, Minutes, 1859-2023, December 28, 1875 (<https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/Record/View/2913DE329A512A173E90257CCA6896A6> : accessed August 6, 2023).

²⁶ Articles of Incorporation of West Side Wharf Company, filed June 10, 1876. The document is preserved at the Washington State Archives.

²⁷ Thurston County Deed Book 12, page 381.

²⁸ *Frontier Justice: Territorial Court Case Files*, Thurston Frontier Justice, Case Number THR-1921, Olympia District Court Number 2043 (<https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/Record/View/26F6857A7B5FC68430AD36C0C1013C04> : accessed August 6, 2023).

²⁹ Thurston County Historic Commission, *A Short History of Budd Inlet* (Thurston County Historic Commission, August, 1992), page 4.

³⁰ Articles of Incorporation, Brown's Wharf and Navigation Company were filed April 1, 1886. Trustees were Thomas R. Brown, John F. Hart (in 1900, a lumberman in Tacoma), Winthrop W. Sprague (in 1900, an accountant in Tacoma), James M. Ash-

ton (in 1900, an accountant in Tacoma), and George E. Atkinson (in 1900, a Tacoma Lumberman). The company was reincorporated as Brown's Wharf & Navigation Company on November 23, 1886. Accessed at Washington State Archives.

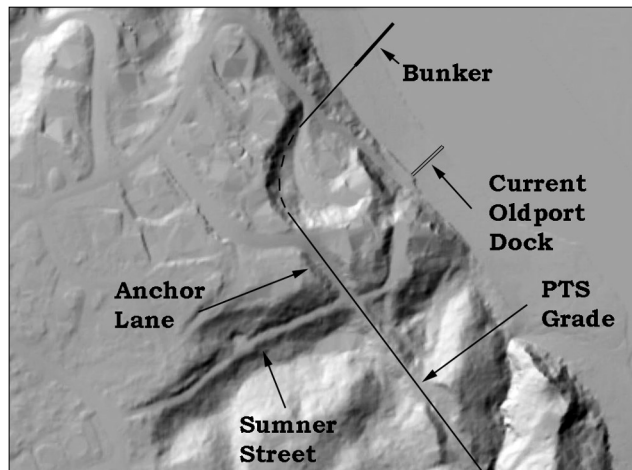
³¹ Vashon History, Vashon-Maury Island Timeline, Settlement: 1865-1889. The website explains that in 1884: "Thomas Brown owned Brown's Wharf and Navigation Co. - built warehouse and wharf in Tacoma next to Hatch's sawmill" (<https://www.vashonhistory.com/Vashon%20History/Timeline/settlement.htm#s1886> : accessed August 6, 2023).

³² Pierce County Assessment Roll for 1885, Thomas R Brown (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-G1VG-SV?i=22&wc=7GM5-61V%3A180934201%2C180956201&cc=1910364> : accessed January 22, 2025).

³³ Eva Sturtevant Troy, *Recollections of Eva Sturtevant Troy*, transcribed by and in the possession of Mary Troy, a resident of the Oldport Community.

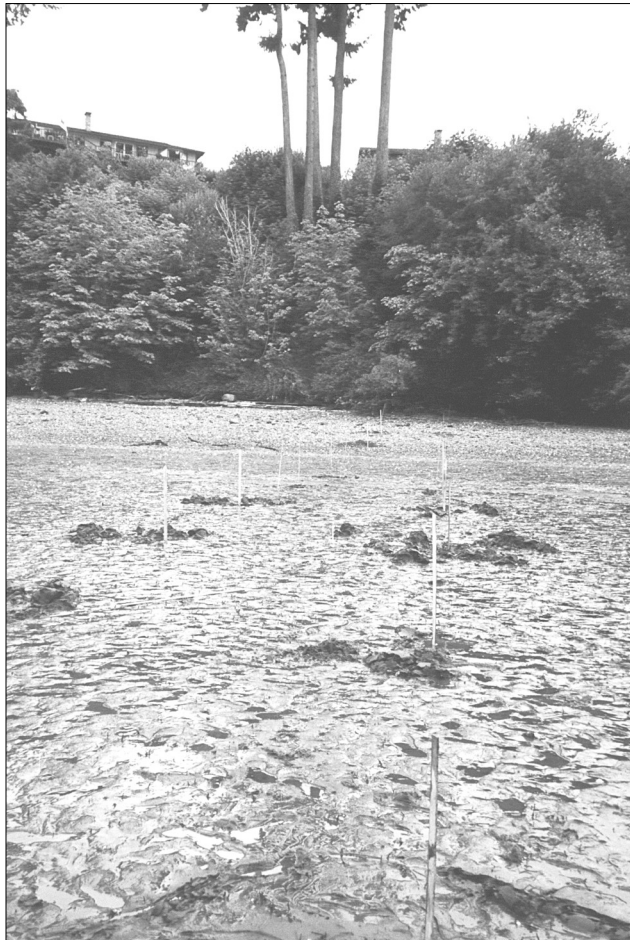
³⁴ Ordinance Records, Olympia City Council, Ordinances, 1859-2018, September 1, 1881, Ordinance Number 148 (<https://digitalarchives.wa.gov/DigitalObject/Download/bb7f455d-a6c6-434f-a737-5be1d38f1eb7> : accessed August 4, 2023).

³⁵ Port of Olympia Commission, *Comprehensive Plan for Utilization of Olympia Harbor, Olympia, Washington*, attached to, and part of: PORT OF



Top: A modern LiDAR ground-imaging photograph of the Oldport Community. The author added the PTS grade and coal bunker, as well as the site of the current Oldport dock. Image courtesy of apps.nationalmap.gov. (<https://apps.nationalmap.gov/viewer/> : accessed February 25, 2025).

Bottom: The author's 2010 photograph taken at the Oldport Community beach, looking west. Here, Fred Saeger uncovered the remnants of sixteen cedar pilings, which are marked with stakes. He speculated that up to another six more pilings could have been found if one looked for them during a lower tide. The grove of five trees in the background can be used to locate where the pilings exist in 2025; this is the northernmost of two groups of trees in that area. Although many writers have opined that these pilings were part of Brown's Wharf, they are, in fact, located where the PTS coal bunker existed.



OLYMPIA RESOLUTION NO. 834
adopted on August 21, 1974, page 3.

³⁶ United States Interstate Commerce Commission, *Interstate Commerce Commission Reports: Decisions of the Interstate Commerce Commission of the United States*. Valuation Docket # 803 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, Volume 116, 1927), page 377.

³⁷ Articles of Incorporation Cherry Hill Coal Company, location in Olympia, Washington, filed December 27, 1889, preserved at Washington State Archives.

³⁸ “AFTER THE COAL – Port Townsend Southern to extend its line to Cherry Hill,” *Morning Olympian*, July 19, 1891, page 1.

³⁹ Henry V. Poor and H. W. Poor, *Poor’s Manual of the Railroads of the United States for 1890*, (New York: H. V. and H. W. Poor, 1890), page 1176.

⁴⁰ Thurston County Deed Book 25, page 496, signed May 26, 1891, a strip of land for right-of-way 50 feet on either side of the center line of the Port Townsend Southern Railroad as now located through, over, and across Lots 7 through 12 of Block 23 in the plat of West Olympia.

⁴¹ Thurston County Deeds - Book 20, page 741; Book 21, page 633; Book 22, page 386; Book 27, page 158; Book 32, pages 197 and 513.

⁴² Thurston County Deed Book 23, page 223, dated August 16, 1890, Theodore Brown, the son of Benjamin F. Brown, sold Lots 1-3 and 7-12 of Block 22 in the plat of West Olympia to the PTS. Recall that in 1858, Lot 3 of Block 22 was part of the property that Benjamin F. Brown sold to the West Olympia Wharf Company.

⁴³ Thurston County Lien Book 2, page 191.

⁴⁴ “The Port Townsend Southern,” *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, January 6, 1891, page 9.

⁴⁵ “Olympia News,” *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, February 1, 1891, page 2.

⁴⁶ James S. Hannum, M.D., “The Port Townsend Southern Railroad,” *Thurston County Historical Journal*, Number 5, April 2018, page 38.

⁴⁷ “PORT TOWNSEND SOUTHERN RAILROAD COMPANY – Office of THE CHIEF ENGINEER. Seattle, Wash., September,” *Oregon Improvement Company records*, 1877-1935, preserved at Special Collections, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.

⁴⁸ “OLYMPIA – BUCODA,” *Olympia Tribune*, April 21, 1892, page 2.

⁴⁹ “PORT TOWNSEND SOUTHERN RAILROAD COMPANY, Mileage and Termini, Olympia Division, Tenino (terminus) to Butler’s Cove (terminus) 17.6 miles,” *Oregon Improvement Company records*, 1877-1935, undated, preserved at Special Collections, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.

⁵⁰ Henry V. Poor and H. W. Poor, *Poor’s Manual of the Railroads of the United States for 1893* (New York: H. V. and H. W. Poor, 1890), page 979.

⁵¹ Thurston County Deed Book 133, page 185, document dated December 19, 1928.

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